

# *Plutarch on the childhood of Alcibiades*

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## Plutarch on the childhood of Alkibiades (*Alk.* 2-3)<sup>1</sup>

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Almost four decades ago, Donald Russell published in this journal an analysis of the first sixteen chapters of the *Life of Alkibiades*, which consist largely of short self-contained anecdotes about Alkibiades' childhood, youth and early career (Russell 1966b). As Russell demonstrated, most of these anecdotes are juxtaposed without any causal link. Although there are the occasional chronological markers - indications, for example, that Alkibiades is getting older and passing from childhood to early manhood - some are plainly out of chronological order and it is impossible to extract a clear chronology from them.<sup>2</sup> Russell argued, however, that to try to extract such a chronological narrative would be to misunderstand the function of this material, which is not to provide a narrative of Alkibiades' early years but rather to illuminate and illustrate his character.

Russell's argument, in particular the stress on Plutarch's interest in character, was seminal; together with two other papers published at roughly the same time, it marked the beginning of a new appreciation of Plutarch as an author of literary merit.<sup>3</sup> But Russell was rather less convinced of the logic of selection of the five childhood anecdotes, which relate to Alkibiades' youth and comprise some one and a half pages of Teubner text (*Alk.* 2-3). His analysis ran to a mere six lines:

Some shape is given to the three childhood stories in 2 by ἐπεὶ δ' εἰς τὸ μανθάνειν ἦκε (2.5), which marks a new stage of education. All show Alcibiades in a favourable light, as a proud and spirited boy. But this order is followed by something like chaos. The two stories (3) from Antiphon's λαιδορίαί form a sort of footnote; the first of them, which is a love story, has not even been integrated into the general context of ἐρωτικά to which Plutarch now turns.<sup>4</sup>

The purpose of this paper is to explore these five anecdotes in more depth in order to assess their function both within the anecdotal section (*Alk.* 2-16) and within the

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<sup>1</sup> Much of the spade-work for this paper was done at the British School at Athens in the Winter of 2000. It was completed during a term as Tytus Visiting Scholar in the University of Cincinnati in the Autumn of 2002. Versions of it were given at the conference of the International Plutarch Society in Nijmegen (May 2002), and at seminars in Cincinnati (November 2002) and Reading (February 2003). I am grateful to Paul Cartledge, Christopher Pelling, Philip Stadter and the anonymous reader for *PCPhS* for their helpful comments, and to Diotima Papadi for her proof-reading of the final version.

<sup>2</sup> As Russell (1966b), 42-3 (= 1995 repr., 200) noted, the chronological markers in some cases give the *impression* of a chronological progression which is actually false. See also Frazier (1996) 76-8.

<sup>3</sup> Russell (1963; 1966a; 1966b): all reprinted in Scardigli (1995). Russell's influential book (Russell 1973) soon followed.

<sup>4</sup> Russell (1966b), 39 (= 2002 repr., 194-195).

Life as a whole. I hope to demonstrate that Russell's analysis, brilliant as it was, did not do justice to the richness of these stories. They are carefully constructed to fulfil three functions. First, they introduce the reader to the character of Alkibiades. They refine and flesh out the explicit statement of character given in 2.1, but they do more than this: they actually serve themselves to construct Alkibiades' character - through his own actions and words and the reactions of others to him. Secondly, these anecdotes signal and prefigure key themes which will be central to the Life which follows. Thirdly, these anecdotes introduce key images: like Aeschylus in the *Oresteia*, Plutarch constructs character, creates meaning and gives unity to his text through the repetition of dominant imagery. As will become clear, these stories make heavy demands on the reader, who is constructed here as a literate and sophisticated collaborator in a shared biographical endeavour.

### Plutarch and the childhood anecdote

As is well known, Plutarch frequently uses anecdote to indicate or explore character. His most famous statement of this occurs in the prologue to the *Alexander-Caesar*, where he warns the reader not to 'quibble'<sup>5</sup> if he does not recount in full all of the great events (ie. the military doings) of the careers of Alexander and Caesar.

'For there is not always in the most outstanding of deeds a revelation of virtue or vice, but often a little matter like a saying or a joke hints at character more than battles where thousands die, huge troop deployments or the sieges of cities'.

Plutarch claims that, like a portrait painter who concentrates on the face and the eyes 'by which character is hinted at', so too he will concentrate on what he calls 'the signs of the soul' (*Alex.* 1.2-3).<sup>6</sup> The *Alexander - Caesar* prologue implies that apparently minor details about the subject, and in particular their sayings, can provide fruitful material to reveal character.<sup>7</sup> Such anecdotes or other characterising material are indeed common both in the *Alexander - Caesar* and in the *Lives* in general. They can occur at any point in a Life, but are often concentrated at one of two points: either at the start, where they usually relate to the subject's childhood or early years, or at the high point of the subject's power or success.<sup>8</sup> In both cases, such anecdotes are usually presented either without regard to chronological

<sup>5</sup> συκοφαντεῖν: the translation is Pelling's (2002b), 276-277.

<sup>6</sup> On this prologue, see Duff (1999), 14-22.

<sup>7</sup> Cf. *Cato Min.* 24.1 (εἰ δὲ δεῖ μὴδὲ τὰ μικρὰ τῶν ἡθῶν σημεῖα παραλιπεῖν, ὥσπερ εἰκόνα ψυχῆς ὑπογραφομένους); 37.10 (ταῦτα μὲν οὖν οὐχ ἥττον οἰόμενοι τῶν ὑπαίθρων καὶ μεγάλων πράξεων πρὸς ἔνδειξιν ἡθους καὶ κατανόησιν ἔχειν τινὰ σαφήνειαν, ἐπὶ πλέον διήλθομεν).

<sup>8</sup> Childhood anecdotes: e.g. *Cic.* 2.1-5; *Them.* 2.1-3; *Alex.* 4.8-10.4 (with Stadter 1996); *Cato Min.* 1.3-3.10; *Demetr.* 3.1-4.5. Characterising anecdotes at the high point: e.g. *Lys.* 18.4-19.6; *Them.* 18.1-9; *Cic.* 24.1-27.6. See Polman (1974).

sequence at all or with only a very loose chronological framework: what is important is the character traits revealed.<sup>9</sup>

We might expect anecdotes about childhood to give some sense of character *development*: specific events, for example, which traumatised the subject and influenced him psychologically or emotionally, or stories which are revealing of the influences at work on the young child: a parent's affection, for example, or lack of it, events or experiences which might be thought to have contributed to the way the subject turned out later.<sup>10</sup> Plutarch was certainly capable of this kind of analysis, and does on occasion do it: he points, for example, to Coriolanus' special relationship with his mother (*Cor.* 4.5-7), or the effect on Themistokles of Miltiades' success at Marathon, which gives him sleepless nights (*Them.* 3.4).<sup>11</sup> But, as Pelling has demonstrated, such analyses are in fact rare.

Plutarch is more interested, it is true, in education. Particularly for Roman subjects education is used both as an item of evaluation in its own right and as an explanation for later success or failure.<sup>12</sup> But generally Plutarch's analyses even of education, where they occur, are perfunctory. What *exactly* a subject gained or did not gain from his education, for example, is rarely explored: a mere statement of its presence or absence, and occasionally a remark on whether it included artistic subjects as well as the practical, is normally all we get.<sup>13</sup> In the *Perikles* there is some sense of influence, that Perikles' character developed the way it did because of contact with his teachers (*Per.* 4-6), but the anecdotes told - his calm submission to a heckler's abuse, for example (5.2) - are used to *illustrate* this character rather than to explain it. Indeed, the particular events mentioned in *Per.* 4-6 certainly did not actually happen when Perikles was a child but belonged to a later period of his life.<sup>14</sup> The early anecdotes of the *Perikles*, in other words, are not told as formative experiences which changed him; instead they provide evidence of what his character was like and would remain. In general, then, we can say of Plutarch that, where childhood experiences or influences are invoked, the purpose is not really to explain

<sup>9</sup> As with the anecdotes in the first chapters of the *Alkibiades*, chronology is often obscure in such groupings in other Lives. It is hard to abstract a chronology from e.g. the *Perikles* before chapter 9, or in the section on his statesmanship at the height of his power in 15-23 (Stadter 1989, xxxviii-xl, 187 and 209; cf. Steidle 1951, 152-166). Similar might be said of the *Phokion* before chapter 12 (Bearzot 1985, 17-21 or 1993, 92-96). On Plutarch and chronology, see Russell (1973), 102-103 and 115-116; Duff (1999), 312-313.

<sup>10</sup> The classic studies of Plutarch's treatment of childhood are Pelling (1988a and 1990a), to which this paragraph is much indebted.

<sup>11</sup> Cf. Duff (forthcoming, b), 00-00.

<sup>12</sup> E.g. *Cor.* 1.4-5; *Cato Maj.* 23.1-3; *Mar.* 2.2-4; cf. *Phil.* 1.2-7.

<sup>13</sup> On education as an important theme in Plutarch, especially in the Roman Lives, see Pelling (1989); Swain (1989), 62-66; (1990); (1996), 140-144; Duff (1999), 76-77. On the relative lack of information on what exactly it consisted of or how it affected the subject's development, see Pelling (1990a); (2002b), 321-322. For the contrast between artistic/intellectual and practical education: see e.g. *Them.* 2.1-7; *Cic.* 2.2-5; *Phil.* 3.1-5.

<sup>14</sup> Stadter (1989) 68.

*why* a particular individual developed the way he did; rather anecdotes from childhood are deployed in order to give early indications of the adult character.<sup>15</sup>

Childhood anecdotes, then, most often assume a static character and are deployed to reveal and prefigure the character-traits which will be more prominent later in life. In Plutarch, they often perform a second, more 'literary' function, related to the structure of the text in which they are placed: they introduce the reader to and prefigure broader themes and images which will recur as the Life progresses. A good example of Plutarch's use of the anecdote both to characterise the subject of the Life and to introduce important themes is provided by the stories told about Alexander the Great's childhood (*Alex.* 4.8-10.4). Most noticeable is the story of his taming of the horse Boukephalas in *Alex.* 6, which illustrates Alexander's courage and ambition, as well as prefiguring the theme of conquest and of the necessity that Alexander's spirited nature, like Boukephalas', be trained and controlled.<sup>16</sup>

Another good example of such prefiguring anecdotes is provided by the two stories told about the young Themistokles in chapter 2 of his Life:

ἃ δὲ τούτων ἐξαργῶσιν ἔνιοι διηγήματα πλάττοντες, ἀποκήρυξιν μὲν ὑπὸ τοῦ πατρὸς αὐτοῦ, θάνατον δὲ τῆς μητρὸς ἐκούσιον ἐπὶ τῇ τοῦ παιδὸς ἀτιμίᾳ περιλύπου γενομένης, δοκεῖ κατεψεῦσθαι, καὶ τοῦναντίον εἰσὶν οἱ λέγοντες, ὅτι τοῦ τὰ κοινὰ πράττειν ἀποτρέπων αὐτὸν ὁ πατὴρ ἐπεδείκνυε πρὸς τῇ θαλάττῃ τὰς παλαιὰς τριήρεις ἐρριμμένας καὶ παρορωμένας, ὥς δὴ καὶ πρὸς τοὺς δημαγωγούς, ὅταν ἄχρηστοι γένωνται, τῶν πολλῶν ὁμοίως ἐχόντων.

As for the fictional stories which some connect with this, that he was renounced by his father and that his mother committed suicide in grief at her son's dishonour, they seem to be false. Indeed there are people who say the opposite, that his father, wishing to discourage him from pursuing public life, used to point out to him the old triremes lying on the beach cast-aside and overlooked, saying that the people behave in the same way towards its leaders, when they have no use for them (*Them.* 2.8)

The first story, which Plutarch explicitly claims to be false, is that Themistokles was renounced by his father and that his mother in consequence committed suicide 'at her son's dishonour'. Plutarch denies the truth of this, but the pattern of rejections, dishonour and suicide will recur in Themistokles' own life; this story prefigures, then, Themistokles' own end. The fact that Plutarch is prepared both to deny the

<sup>15</sup> This is in some ways surprising, as in theoretical discussions, such as Plutarch's *On moral virtue*, there is an allowance for change and development of character. Pelling (1990a), 213-224 (= 2002 repr. 301-307) notes that the rather static characterisation in the Lives may be partly a result of genre: political biography does in general seem less interested in childhood than do texts about intellectuals.

<sup>16</sup> This anecdote and its relationship to the rest of the Life, as well as Plutarch's anecdotal technique more generally, are explored by Stadter (1996); the anecdote is explored by Frazier (1992), 4496-4499 as an example of Plutarch's tendency to articulate his narrative into a series of grandes scènes (see below, n. 100). It and the preceding childhood anecdote in *Alex.* 5 are undatable (Hamilton 1969 on *Alex.* 5.1).

truth of the story and at the same time make use of it is a good indication of the function that such anecdotes perform: their role in highlighting character and prefiguring later themes and patterns is more important than their reliability. Perhaps the most well-known example of this is Plutarch's treatment of the tradition of Solon's meeting with Kroisos – he acknowledges that on chronological grounds it cannot have happened, but justifies its inclusion by both the number of 'witnesses' to it (ie. literary authorities) and the fact that it 'fits Solon's character and is worthy of his magnanimity and wisdom' (*Solon* 27.1).<sup>17</sup> We shall see another example of this use for literary or moral purposes of material the truth of which Plutarch explicitly questions in *Alk.* 3.1-2 (below, p. 00).

The second Themistokles anecdote is connected logically with the first - career advice from his father proves that there was no rift with him - but also thematically, as it continues the theme of rejection and dishonour. First, the incident characterises Themistokles indirectly as ambitious for political success, a point repeatedly and explicitly made in the early chapters - so ambitious his father tries to discourage him. We should note that the anecdote is not used to *explain* his ambition; there is no sense here that this incident, or his father's experiences of an ungrateful people, or his own musings by the seashore, actually influenced Themistokles' development, made him more or less ambitious, more cautious or fearful of the people. On the contrary, the anecdote is illustrative rather than explanatory, and assumes, as we noted earlier, a static character. Secondly, the anecdote has a function beyond the illustration of Themistokles' character. It introduces two themes which will be important in the rest of the text: the navy and popular ingratitude. Themistokles himself would be intimately connected with the navy; his naval policy would lead to the salvation of Athens. It would also lead to the beginning of a destructive split between the few and the many, a major concern of the *Themistokles - Camillus* pair (Plutarch makes the link between the naval policy and party-strife explicit in *Them.* 19.3-5). The anecdote also introduces the theme of popular ingratitude towards its leaders, and prefigures Themistokles' own end, rejected by his people, like the ships on the seashore. Indeed this image, of objects lying neglected on the seashore, is one that will recur and which conveys something profound both about Themistokles and about the Athens of his time. At the height of his power, in one of a series of anecdotes, he will look at the bodies of Persians 'cast up on the shore' (18.2). It is an irony, and an irony which conveys something of the nature of political life in Athens, that the man who created Athens' navy and led it to such success would end up himself 'cast-aside and overlooked' like the ships to which Athens owed its salvation and with which his own career was so intimately linked, and like the bodies of those whom he defeated. The anecdote, then, and the imagery which it contains, provide an early hint of both later success and later disaster.

<sup>17</sup> πρέποντα τῷ Σόλωνος ἦθει καὶ τῆς ἐκείνου μεγαλοφροσύνης καὶ σοφίας ἄξιον. Similarly in the *Lykourgos*, Plutarch rejects apparent evidence that the establishment of the *krypteia* dated from Lykourgos' times, on the grounds that it did not accord with his character (*Lyk.* 28.1-2, 12-13). On *Solon* 27.1 and its implications, see Pelling (1990c), 19-21 (= 2002 repr. 143-145); Duff (1999), 312-313.

**Alkibiades' character**

The prefiguring and anticipatory force of childhood anecdotes is nowhere clearer than in the early chapters of the *Life of Alkibiades*. After a discussion of Alkibiades' family, appearance and voice (1.1-8), all usual features of the opening of a Plutarchan Life,<sup>18</sup> the anecdotal section opens with a clear statement of Alkibiades' adult character, the only explicit narratorial statement of character in the whole Life.

Τὸ δ' ἦθος αὐτοῦ πολλὰς μὲν ὕστερον, ὥς εἰκὸς ἐν πράγμασι μεγάλοις καὶ τύχαις πολυτρόποις, ἀνομοιότητας πρὸς αὐτὸ καὶ μεταβολὰς ἐπεδείξατο. φύσει δὲ πολλῶν ὄντων καὶ μεγάλων παθῶν ἐν αὐτῷ τὸ φιλόνικον ἰσχυρότατον ἦν καὶ τὸ φιλόπρωτον, ὥς δῆλόν ἐστι τοῖς παιδικοῖς ἀπομνημονεύμασιν.

His character later displayed many inconsistencies and changes, as one might expect in the midst of great matters and varied fortunes. By nature, there were many great passions in him, but love of winning and love of coming first were the strongest, as is clear from his childhood anecdotes. (*Alk.* 2.1)

Plutarch is drawing here upon a common ancient distinction between nature (φύσις) and character (ἦθος).<sup>19</sup> Alkibiades' character is said to have 'later' (ὕστερον) displayed many inconsistencies and changes, 'as one might expect in the midst of great matters and varied fortunes'. Plutarch seems, then, to blame circumstances, specifically the ups and downs of Alkibiades' fortune, for this changeability.<sup>20</sup>

The notion that the stress of great suffering or changes of fortune could alter character is not unknown elsewhere in Plutarch;<sup>21</sup> he will later bring out, in a passage which recalls this one, how remarkable was Alkibiades' ability to change his behaviour when it suited the circumstances, though there he cautions that Alkibiades 'did not receive *every* change into his character' (οὐδὲ πᾶσαν δεχόμενος τῷ ἦθει μεταβολήν): some of his apparent inconsistency was mere play-acting for short-term goals (23.5). Russell was worried that the claim that circumstances were at least

<sup>18</sup> E.g. *Per.* 3.3-7; *Alex.* 2.1-4.7; *Phok.* 4.1-5.10; *Cato Maj.* 1.1-10; *Pyrrh.* 1.1-3.9; *Mar.* 1.1-3.1; *Demetr.* 2.1-3; *Ant.* 1.1-2.1 and 4.1-5. See Leo (1901), 180-182.

<sup>19</sup> The distinction is set out most clearly in the treatise *On moral virtue* (cf. *De Sera Num.* 551d; 562b). A person's nature is what he is born with; a person's character is related to his nature, but is affected, for better or worse, by the kind of life he or she habitually leads, and by the extent to which reason has molded it. On nature and character in Plutarch, see Dihle (1956), 63-64 and 84-87; Bergen (1962), 62-94; Russell (1966a), 144-147 [= 1995 repr., 83-86]; Wardman (1974), 132-137; Gill (1983), 472-475 and 478-481; Swain (1989), 62-64; Duff (1999), 72-78. See also below, n. 21 on character-change.

<sup>20</sup> Plutarch consistently brings out Alkibiades' inconsistency and unpredictability throughout the Life: see Duff (1999), 229-240, and below p.00. Alkibiades' inconsistency and his ability to make himself agreeable to those he was with were plainly features of the tradition more generally (e.g. Satyros in Athen. 534b; *Nep. Alc.* 1.4; 11.3-6).

<sup>21</sup> See the passages collected in Duff (1999), 25; cf. on character-change in Plutarch generally, see Russell (1966a), 144-147 (= 1995 repr. 81-86); Swain (1989), 65-68.

partly responsible for Alkibiades' inconsistency does not sit well with his presentation as having an exceptionally versatile character.<sup>22</sup> But character in ancient thought is both revealed in and moulded by action: there is no contradiction in linking Alkibiades' exceptionally changeable character with the stress of difficult circumstances, nor in saying that not every change of behaviour changed his character.

More difficult to reconcile with this passage are the final words of the anecdotal section (16.9), where Plutarch declares of Alkibiades 'So undecided was opinion about him due to the unevenness of his nature (διὰ τὴν τῆς φύσεως ἀνωμαλίαν)'. The phrase plainly recalls 2.1 and provides a neat sense of closure to the anecdotal section. But it is striking that here it is Alkibiades' *nature* which is said to be inconsistent. This might be the result of nothing more than a loose, non-technical use of the term, though the inconsistency of terminology may also itself be seen as contributing to the reader's difficulty in knowing the 'real Alkibiades', the man of inconsistencies. Whatever quite we make of 16.9, in 2.1 Alkibiades' character is presented as inconsistent, but his underlying nature as constant and rather easier to define: it contained many different passions - rather a negative term for Plutarch in such contexts - the most powerful of which were his 'love of winning' and 'love of coming first'.<sup>23</sup> The stories which follow are introduced explicitly in illustration of this ambition ('as is clear from his childhood anecdotes').<sup>24</sup> As we shall see, however, they have a much wider anticipatory and illustrative force, hinting not only at Alkibiades' unpredictability but at much else beside.

### The wrestling-match

ἐν μὲν γὰρ τῷ παλαίειν πιεζόμενος, ὑπὲρ τοῦ μὴ πεσεῖν ἀναγαγὼν πρὸς τὸ στόμα τὰ ἄμματα τοῦ πιεζοῦντος οἷος ἦν διαφαγεῖν τὰς χεῖρας. ἀφέντος οὖν τὴν λαβὴν ἐκείνου καὶ εἰπόντος· "δᾶκνεις ὥς Ἀλκιβιάδῃ καθάπερ αἱ γυναῖκες", "οὐκ ἔγωγε" εἶπεν, "ἀλλ' ὥς οἱ λέοντες.

For when he was being squeezed in a wrestling match, to save himself from falling he pulled up the grip of the man who was squeezing him to his mouth and almost bit through his hands. The other loosened his grip and said, 'You bite like a woman, Alkibiades!'. 'No I do not', he said, 'but like a lion!'. (Alk. 2.2-3)

The first three anecdotes perhaps took their starting point from Sokrates' brief statement in the *First Alkibiades*: 'For you learnt, if my memory serves me correctly,

<sup>22</sup> Russell (1966b), 38 (= 1995 repr., 193).

<sup>23</sup> On these passions, see Duff (1999), 72-87 with bibliography.

<sup>24</sup> Pelling (1996), xlvi suggested that these stories did not really illustrate Alkibiades' desire to win. I have less problem with seeing them this way than he does, although we are in agreement that the stories in fact present a much richer characterisation than the explicit narratorial statement had suggested (see below p. 00). For similar references forward to the narrative itself to back up an initial moral characterisation, see *Per.* 2.5; *Kim.* 3.3; *Pomp.* 23.6 and 46.4, with Hillman (1994); *Flam.* 2.5; *Mar.* 2.4; *Ag./Kleom.* 2.9; *Arat.* 10.5; cf. *Quaest. Conv.* 697e.



reading and writing, playing the *kithara* and wrestling. You refused to learn to play the *aulos*' (106e).<sup>25</sup> The first anecdote concerns Alkibiades' biting of his opponent's arm while wrestling. His opponent cries in accusation 'You bite like women, Alkibiades!', but he replies 'No I don't, but like lions!'. Biting was of course forbidden both in standard wrestling and in the more violent *pankration*<sup>26</sup> - though there are elsewhere references to and even pictures of this happening.<sup>27</sup> The incident may well not have originated with Alkibiades: in the *Spartan Sayings* it is told of a nameless Spartan (*Ap. Lac.* 234d-e).<sup>28</sup> But the precise origin of the story is not relevant to the function it plays in this text. The story illustrates first and foremost Alkibiades' desire to win, which was stated explicitly in the previous sentence, as well as his cunning;<sup>29</sup> note the use of the Odyssean word *πολύτροπος* in the previous sentence.<sup>30</sup> Secondly, there is a suggestion of the blurring of gender boundaries: is the reader meant to think that Alkibiades might be in any sense 'like a woman'? An element of sexual ambiguity will indeed be a recurrent feature of the Life. In the final chapter of the anecdotal section we are told, in a striking phrase, of Alkibiades' 'femininities (θηλύτητας) of purple clothing' (16.1).<sup>31</sup> In the narrative of his sojourn in Sparta he is assimilated with the Achilles who dressed up in female clothes in the palace on Skyros in order to avoid going to the Trojan War (23.5-9); a tragic quotation there declares disturbingly 'he is the same woman as always' (23.6).<sup>32</sup> And after his death, his mistress, Timandra, buries him in her own clothes (39.7). This first anecdote, then, signals a sexual ambiguity in Alkibiades.

<sup>25</sup> ἔμαθες γὰρ δὴ σύ γε κατὰ μνήμην τὴν ἐμὴν γράμματα καὶ καθαρίζειν καὶ παλαίειν. οὐ γὰρ δὴ αὐλεῖν γε ἤθελες μαθεῖν. The authenticity of the Platonic *Alk.* I should never have been doubted: see Denyer (2001), 14-26 (pace Gribble 1999, 260-262). In any case, Plutarch certainly took it as authentic - and alludes to it frequently in his *Life of Alkibiades*, right from the first chapter (1.3).

<sup>26</sup> Although Philostratos claims that here it was allowed unusually by Spartans (*Phil. Imag.* 2.6.3). For the rules of ancient wrestling and *pankration*, see Harris (1964), 102-109; Poliakoff (1987), 23-63.

<sup>27</sup> A picture on a Panathenaic amphora in the British Museum shows a wrestler or pankratiast biting an opponent's arm, which seems to be what is envisaged here; the referee's stick is pictured about to descend to strike and disqualify the rule-breaker (Harris 1964, pl. 17).

<sup>28</sup> In *Reg. et Imp.* 186d it is assigned to Alkibiades. On the tendency of anecdotes to become detached from their original context, see Fairweather (1974), 266-270; (1984), 323-327; Saller (1980), 73-82; Dover (1988), esp. 48-9. This tendency is particularly noticeable in Plutarch's apophthegmata collections, on which see Pelling (2002a); Stadter (forthcoming).

<sup>29</sup> Plutarch presents himself as arguing in *Quaest. Conv.* 638d that wrestling is the most skilful and cunning of all the sports (τεχνικώτατον καὶ πανουργότατον τῶν ἀθλημάτων). Poliakoff (1982), 21-22, n. 20, give other references on the need for cunning in wrestling.

<sup>30</sup> τύχαις πολυτρόποις (2.1). *πολύτροπος* is used of Alkibiades at 24.5. It is a standard epithet for Odysseus, both in Homer (*Od.* 1.1; 10.330) and elsewhere (e.g. Plato, *Hipp. Min.* 364c-365b: with Hesk 2000, 121-122). A strand in the tradition on Alkibiades seems to have compared him to Odysseus, who in general was characterised by his cunning and deceptiveness (e.g. Walcot, 1977; cf. *Brut. An.* 987c): Christodoros in *AP* 2.85 describes Alkibiades as πολύφρονα μῆτιν ἐγείρων cf. Odysseus in Homer as ποικιλομήτης (e.g. *Il.* 11.482; *Od.* 3.163; 13.293; 22.115).

<sup>31</sup> Athenaios (534d-e) records that, according to Satyros, on Alkibiades' return to Athens from Olympia he dedicated two paintings of himself by Aglaophon, one of which showed him sitting at the feet of Nemea, and 'appearing more beautiful than the faces of women'. For some reason Plutarch does not include this detail when he mentions the painting, which he assigns to Aristophon, in 16.7.

<sup>32</sup> See Duff (1999), 236-237.

Throughout the early chapters of the life there is a stress on Alkibiades' beauty, and on his many male lovers which his good looks, combined with his wealth and status, encouraged. It is no coincidence, then, that the first anecdote is set in a wrestling match: wrestling grounds were a well-known location for men to pick up youths in Classical Athens.<sup>33</sup> The language of wrestling, furthermore - and indeed of biting - is commonly used metaphorically for sex.<sup>34</sup> The anecdote prepares the reader, then, for the presence of Alkibiades' many lovers. It also prepares us for the presence of Sokrates, already mentioned in the first chapter (1.3). Educated readers would remember Alkibiades' account in Plato's *Symposium* of his wrestling match with Sokrates, which led to Alkibiades' failed attempt to seduce him (217b-c). Plutarch makes no mention of that incident in the *Life*, but their wrestling together is mentioned briefly in 4.4, and Sokrates' educational influence will itself be described repeatedly with wrestling, and biting, metaphors.<sup>35</sup> Wrestling, then, becomes in Plutarch's *Life* a site for debate and reflection on Alkibiades' character: it symbolises his desire to win, his use of underhand methods, his ambiguous sexuality, the attentions of his other lovers, and the educational influence of Sokrates. It also signals a contrast with Coriolanus, whose *Life* is paired with that of Alkibiades. Coriolanus' wrestling matches, described in chapter 2 of the *Coriolanus*, were real and not educational, and to win them he used his strength and not his cunning (2.1). Alkibiades is a very different character.

'Alkibiades pulled up the grip of the man who was squeezing him to his mouth (στόμα) and almost bit through his hands'. The word στόμα and an emphasis on the mouth recurs repeatedly in the other anecdotes of this chapter.<sup>36</sup> The reason is presumably because Alkibiades' mouth - his words, the beauty and persuasiveness of his speech - will be such an important part of Plutarch's picture of him. Indeed, several lines earlier Plutarch has already drawn attention to this very feature, the charm of Alkibiades' speech and especially of his lisp (1.6-8). Later he remarks on Alkibiades' rhetorical powers and, again, on the charm of his speech (10.3-4). Numerous examples of his persuasive speech are included in the *Life*,<sup>37</sup> and in the *synkrisis* Plutarch picks out this ability of Alkibiades as one of the qualities which distinguishes him from Coriolanus (*Cor.-Alk.* 3.3-6).

His opponent accuses him of biting like a woman (literally, 'as women do'); Alkibiades' replies that he fights - or bites - like a lion. A passage from Lucian's *Life*

<sup>33</sup> E.g. Aristoph. *Wasps* 1025; *Peace* 762-3; Plato, *Phaidros* 255d and the settings of *Charmides* and *Lysis*; Plut. *Amat.* 752b-c: see Dover (1978), 54-55, 138; Percy (1996), 113-116; Fisher (1998), 94-104.

<sup>34</sup> At great length in ps.-Louk. *Golden Ass* 7-11 (where the female partner is called Palaistra); cf. also Aristoph. *Peace* 896-898; *Ekkli.* 964-5 with Henderson (1974); *AP* 12.206, 222. See Henderson (1991), 169-170; Poliakoff (1982), 101-136; Swain (1992), 79-80, commenting on *Ant.* 9.7 (Κυθηρὶς ἀπὸ τῆς αὐτῆς παλαίστρας γύναιον ἀγαπῶμενον).

<sup>35</sup> δηγμόν (4.2), πιεζοῦντος (4.3), πολλὰς λαβὰς (6.2); πιέζων . . . καὶ συστέλλων (6.5).

<sup>36</sup> καταβαλὼν ἐπὶ στόμα (2.4), αὐλοῦς δὲ φουσῶντος ἀνθρώπου στόματι (2.5), τὸν δὲ αὐλὸν ἐπιστομίζειν (2.6).

<sup>37</sup> E.g. 14.1-12; 15.4-8; 17.2-4; 18.2-3; 23.2; 24.2; 25.2; 26.4-9.

of *Demonax* (49) shows that 'lions' was a popular term for wrestlers, at least in the mid-second century AD; Lucian relates this to their biting.<sup>38</sup> So there is a fairly straightforward explanation for the reply as Plutarch records it, which would have made sense to his readers. But lions are more generally associated with heroic prowess (e.g. *Iliad* 5.638-9 of Herakles); the more common contrast is not with women but with foxes: lions are fierce and brave and not - paradoxically, given the context - cunning, like foxes.<sup>39</sup> Alkibiades is later associated with another animal, the chameleon - a symbol of cunning. The reply then sets up in the reader's mind a question about Alkibiades: what sort of a fighter is he? is he cunning or brave? is he to be admired or not?<sup>40</sup>

The popular association of lions with masculinity might add to the element of sexual transgressivity here.<sup>41</sup> But lions are also often associated with monarchy or tyranny.<sup>42</sup> The fact that Alkibiades might try to make himself tyrant is a feature both of this *Life* and of much earlier literature on Alkibiades. Indeed, Alkibiades was famously himself likened to a lion in Aristophanes' *Frogs* 1431-2, a passage which itself perhaps alludes to the simile of the lion cub in Aeschylus' *Agamemnon* 730-735 or at least to the underlying fable - if you raise a lion cub, do not be misled by its apparent gentleness and loveliness; it will show its true violent nature when it grows up.<sup>43</sup> Plato exploited both these general associations of lions with tyranny and violence, and perhaps the *Frogs* passage specifically, in a speech by Kallikles in the *Gorgias*.<sup>44</sup> Kallikles is defending the 'law of nature' that the strong rule the weak, and complains that generally society tries to make the strong conform to its rules:

πλάττοντες τοὺς βελτίστους καὶ ἐρρωμενεστάτους ἡμῶν αὐτῶν, ἐκ νέων λαμβάνοντες, ὥσπερ λέοντας, κατεπάδοντές τε καὶ γοητεύοντες καταδουλούμεθα λέγοντες ὡς τὸ ἴσον χρὴ ἔχειν καὶ τοῦτό ἐστιν τὸ καλὸν

<sup>38</sup> 'When Demonax saw many of the athletes fighting dirty and against the rules of the contest by biting instead of wrestling, he said "No wonder the athletes of today are called lions by their supporters" (οὐκ ἀπαικίτως, ἔφη, τοὺς νῦν ἀθλητὰς οἱ παραμαρτυροῦντες λέοντας καλοῦσιν)'.

<sup>39</sup> Pindar, *Isthmian* 4.49; Aristoph. *Peace* 1189-1190, with the comment of the scholiast; Plut. *Sulla* 28.6; *Lys.-Sulla* 3.2. Some other references in Duff (1999), 175-6. On Homeric lion-similes, see Schnapp-Gourbeillon (1981).

<sup>40</sup> There may be a play here on the etymology of Alkibiades' name (from ἀλκή, strength): used ironically by Alkibiades' opponent, justified by Alkibiades' retort.

<sup>41</sup> On lions and masculinity, see Polemon 1.194-196 Förster; Förster's index II.2 (p. 461), s.v. leo; and the passages collected in Gleason (1990), 404-5.

<sup>42</sup> E.g. Hdt. 5.56; 5.92; 6.131.2; Aristoph. *Knights* 1037. Hdt. 6.131.2 (Plutarch's source for *Per.* 3.3) records a dream had by Perikles' mother shortly before his birth that she would give birth to a lion, which plainly draws on the rich associations of the animal in ancient thought. See the discussion of McNellen (1997) who emphasises, through analysis of other occurrences of the lion in Herodotos, its negative implications for Perikles.

<sup>43</sup> See Fraenkel (1950), ii, 341-342 on the Aeschylean passage and the underlying fable. He believed that there is no direct allusion between the *Agamemnon*, *Frogs* and *Gorgias* passages but that all show knowledge of the same basic fable.

<sup>44</sup> In fact 473e, and probably 474a, suggest a dramatic date for the *Gorgias* of 405 BC, the year of production of the *Frogs*, and shortly after Alkibiades' second exile. But other passages suggest other dates, so this should not be pressed: see Dodds (1959), 17-8. On the Kallikles of the *Gorgias* as perhaps standing in some measure for Alkibiades, see Vickers (1994); Gribble (1999), 234-238.

καὶ τὸ δίκαιον. ἐὰν δέ γε οἶμαι φύσιν ἱκανὴν γένηται ἔχων ἀνὴρ, πάντα ταῦτα ἀποσεισάμενος καὶ διαρρήξας καὶ διαφυγὼν, καταπατήσας τὰ ἡμέτερα γράμματα καὶ μαγγανεύματα καὶ ἐπωδὰς καὶ νόμους τοὺς παρὰ φύσιν ἅπαντας, ἐπαναστὰς ἀνεφάνη δεσπότης ἡμέτερος ὁ δοῦλος, καὶ ἐνταῦθα ἐξέλαμψεν τὸ τῆς φύσεως δίκαιον.

Moulding the best and strongest among us, we take them from youth, as though they were lions, and enchanting them and bewitching them we make slaves of them, saying that they should have an equal share and that this is good and just. But if, I think, a man is born with a sufficient nature, he shakes off all these things, breaks out and escapes, trampling our written codes, tricks, spells and laws, which are all contrary to nature, and rising in revolt our slave appears clearly as our master, and then natural justice shines forth. (483e-484a)

We have here the notion of the lion-cub growing up and revealing its truly violent nature, as well as of the lion as tyrant. The similarity with the *Frogs* passage suggests that Plato probably intended Alkibiades to be in mind here;<sup>45</sup> he is frequently referred to elsewhere in the *Gorgias*.<sup>46</sup> At any rate, Plutarch seems to have taken it this way, as he alludes to the *Gorgias* passage towards the end of the *Life of Alkibiades*: in *Alk.* 34.7 he presents as the desires of some of the poor that Alkibiades should make himself tyrant 'overthrowing decrees and laws and those who talk nonsense and ruin the city' (καταβαλὼν ψηφίσματα καὶ νόμους καὶ φλυαροὺς ἀπολλύντας τὴν πόλιν).<sup>47</sup> The lion image, then, with which the anecdotal section begins, brings to mind both the fable of the lion-cub, the passage from Aristophanes' *Frogs* and the passage from Plato's *Gorgias*; the implications for Alkibiades are disturbing and far-reaching.

Plutarch returns to the lion image at the end of the anecdotal section, with a quotation of the Aristophanic lines, with exactly this connotation: fear of tyranny (16.2-3). The repetition provides a sense of closure to the section. Plutarch makes the point there, as he does in 6.3, where he refers explicitly to Thucydides' similar pronouncement, that it was Alkibiades' outrageous personal life which fuelled suspicions that he wanted to become tyrant (Thuc. 6.15.4; cf. also *Alk.* 16.7).<sup>48</sup> In

<sup>45</sup> The stress on the greatness of the man's nature is reminiscent of *Republic* 491d-492a and 495a-b, which was also almost certainly intended to bring Alkibiades to mind (see Duff 1999, 48-49 and 224-226). Cf. ps.-Andok. 4.19 (*Against Alkibiades*), which may be alluding to the Aristophanic passage, if we accept a date for this work of post-405: Alkibiades thinks 'not that he should follow the laws of the city, but that you should follow his ways' (ὅμας τοῖς αὐτοῦ τρόποις ἀκολουθεῖν ἀξιῶν). On the question of the date of ps.-Andok. 4, see Edwards (1995), 131-136; Gazzano (1999), 15-56; Gribble (1999), 154-158.

<sup>46</sup> 481d; 482a; 519a: see the discussion of Gribble (1999), 233-5. Cf. also 485b-c on lisping, for which Alkibiades was famous (Plut. *Alk.* 1.7-8)

<sup>47</sup> Cf. Kallias' words in *Gorg.* 492c: the laws which prevent the stronger from ruling the weaker are φλυαρία καὶ οὐδενὸς ἄξια. The allusion was noted by Russell (1973), 127; (1983), 124; Gribble (1999), 275.

<sup>48</sup> On Plutarch's adaptation of Thucydides in 6.3, see Pelling (1992), 18-19 and 22-24 (=2002 repr., 123-124 and 126-128).

this the first anecdote of the Life we have an example of such outrageous behaviour. The reference to lions foreshadows in childhood that peculiar interplay between personal life and politics which was so characteristic of Alkibiades; fears that his behaviour was tyrannical would lead in the end to his downfall. It also suggests, right at the start of the Life, the violence and destruction that Alkibiades will bring to Athens.

### Knuckle-bones

ἔτι δὲ μικρὸς ὢν ἔπαιζεν ἀστραγάλοις ἐν τῷ στενωπῷ, τῆς δὲ βολῆς καθηκούσης εἰς αὐτόν, ἅμαξα φορτίων ἐπήει. τὸ μὲν οὖν πρῶτον ἐκέλευσε περιμεῖναι τὸν ἄγοντα τὸ ζεύγος· ὑπέπιπτε γὰρ ἡ βολὴ τῇ παρόδῳ τῆς ἀμάξης· μὴ πειθομένου δὲ δι' ἀγροικίαν, ἀλλ' ἐπάγοντος, οἱ μὲν ἄλλοι παῖδες διέσχον, ὁ δ' Ἀλκιβιάδης καταβαλὼν ἐπὶ στόμα πρὸ τοῦ ζεύγους καὶ παρατείνας ἑαυτόν, ἐκέλευσεν οὕτως εἰ βούλεται διεξελθεῖν, ὥστε τὸν μὲν ἄνθρωπον ἀνακροῦσαι τὸ ζεύγος ὀπίσω δείσαντα, τοὺς δ' ἰδόντας ἐκπλαγῆναι καὶ μετὰ βοῆς συνδραμεῖν πρὸς αὐτόν.

When he was still little, he was playing knuckle-bones in the street, but when the throw came in due course to him a loaded wagon began to bear down. Now at first he told the driver of the pair to wait; for his throw had fallen down in the path of the wagon. But when out of boorishness the driver did not obey but came on, the other boys scattered, but Alkibiades, throwing himself on his mouth in front of the pair of horses and stretching himself out, told him to drive right on over him, if he wanted, with the result that the fellow pulled the pair back in fear; those who saw it, however, were astonished and with a shout ran over to him. (*Alk.* 2.3-4)

Immediately following this anecdote, is the story of Alkibiades' playing 'knuckle-bones'.<sup>49</sup> The idea for this story - whether it is an invention by Plutarch or by an earlier author - probably came from another passing remark in the Platonic *First Alkibiades* (110b).<sup>50</sup> In Plutarch's Life, this story is told once again to illustrate Alkibiades' ambition: he will risk his life in his desire to win. Forms or cognates of βάλλω are used repeatedly; Alkibiades makes a throw and then when a wagon approaches along the road throws *himself* in its path;<sup>51</sup> the implication is something

<sup>49</sup> Games involving knucklebones were played on the ground either with actual pieces of animal bone or similarly shaped pieces of pottery or other material. Knucklebones are attested in, for example, *Iliad* 23.87-88; Plato, *Theatetos* 154c; Plut. *Lys.* 8.4-5; *Praec. Ger.* 812a. As Kurke (1999), 283-295 brings out, knucklebones were associated with childhood and, unlike dice (κύβοι), had largely positive associations. For pictures, see Beck (1975), no. 342-5; for description, see Kurke (above) and Salza Prina Ricotti (1995), 47-48.

<sup>50</sup> Sokrates remembers Alkibiades paying with knuckle-bones (ὅποτε ἀστραγαλίζοις ἢ ἄλλην τινὰ παιδιὰν παίζεις), and confidently giving out judgements on which boys were cheating.

<sup>51</sup> τῆς βολῆς . . . ἡ βολή . . . καταβαλὼν.

along the lines of Alkibiades treating his life as if it were a game of chance. But again there is much more to say. First, a reference to dice-throwing had occurred in an almost identical point at the start of the *Coriolanus* (3.1). The context is Coriolanus' first military campaign, when Tarquinius Superbus, as Plutarch puts it, 'made, as it were, a last throw of the dice' (ἔσχατον κύβον ἀφιέντι).<sup>52</sup> The *Coriolanus* passage, and this passage from the *Alkibiades*, would probably also bring to mind Caesar's famous declaration before crossing the Rubicon, *alea iacta est* - or, in Plutarch's Greek, ἀνερρίφθω κύβος, 'let a die be cast!' (*Caes.* 32.8; *Pomp.* 60.4).<sup>53</sup> In the *Coriolanus*, as in the *Caesar*, the dice-throw is a metaphor for war, a war in which all is staked; for Alkibiades the throw is a childhood game, but even so he risks his life for it. Caesar and Tarquin played for high stakes; Alkibiades' dice throwing perhaps suggests that he will gamble later with Athens' foreign policy and survival.<sup>54</sup> These allusions also raise a question: Tarquin was a tyrant; Caesar's rule became 'acknowledged tyranny' (*Caes.* 57.1).<sup>55</sup> will Alkibiades want to become a tyrant too?

There is a stress in this passage on the reactions of others to Alkibiades' decisive behaviour: the other boys scatter, the driver takes fright, onlookers are amazed, cheer and run to congratulate him (2.4).<sup>56</sup> This is a process which will be repeated frequently in the Life: the amazing popularity of Alkibiades is continually emphasised, though often together with hints of the fears which this instilled in some about possible desire for tyranny. At the end of the anecdotal section, people 'used to run with joy' (συνέτρεχον χαίροντες) to see a picture of him in the arms of the goddess Nemea; older people saw it as 'tyrannical and illegal' (16.7). When Alkibiades returns from exile in 32.3 the people 'began running with shouts to meet him' (συντρέχοντες ἐβόων).<sup>57</sup> This is followed soon after by renewed desires on the part of the people, and fears on the part of others, that he might make himself tyrant

<sup>52</sup> For the metaphor cf. *Fab.* 14.2; *Pomp.* 60.4. The metaphor is not found in Dion. Hal. 8.29, Plutarch's source for this passage.

<sup>53</sup> In fact Plutarch claims in *Pomp.* 60.4 that Caesar himself said the phrase in Greek not Latin (cf. Suet. *Div. Iul.* 82.3, where Suetonius has Caesar say not *et tu Brute* but, in Greek, καὶ σύ, τέκνον [with J. Russell 1980; Dubuisson 1980; Brenk 1998]). The saying ἀνερρίφθω κύβος (perf. pass. imperat.) seems to have been a proverbial expression, used before one enters on risky ventures: see Javier del Campo López (1991), adding e.g. Chariton 1.7.1; on the association of the κύβος with random fortune see Kurke 1999, 283-287). But after Caesar's time there would also, one assumes, be the possibility of allusion to Caesar. For the Platonic language of the Rubicon scene, see Duff (1999), 79-80.

<sup>54</sup> As Philip Stadter has pointed out to me, in Caesar's case there may also be some sort of parallel with Alexander's dicing shortly before his death (*Alex.* 76.2).

<sup>55</sup> An allusion to Plato's *Republic* 569b: see Pelling (1997b), 221-222.

<sup>56</sup> τοὺς δ' ἰδόντας ἐκπλαγῆναι καὶ μετὰ βοῆς συνδραμεῖν πρὸς αὐτόν. This is Reiske's emendation; the mss. reading (followed by Flacelière) is ἐκπλαγῆναι μετὰ βοῆς καὶ συνδραμεῖν. But the image of the people 'running with a shout' to greet Alkibiades is a repeated motif in this Life (see the examples cited in the text): Reiske's emendation is certainly to be accepted.

<sup>57</sup> Cf. 4.1: αὐτοῦ τὴν λαμπρότητα τῆς ὥρας ἐκπεληγμένοι καὶ θεραπεύοντες. On the thoughts of onlookers as often providing an authoritative judgement on the subject of the Life, cf. Pelling (1988b), 40; Duff (1999), 55, 120.

(34.7-35.1). But Alkibiades is not to remain always popular, and there may be in the vocabulary with which the knucklebones incident is described a hint of the reversals of popularity which will follow. The word ζεύγος - team of horses - is repeated three times here. As the educated reader was no doubt expected to know, Alkibiades was later to be involved in a scandal over a team of horses, which he was accused of stealing. Alkibiades' son was prosecuted for this crime, and Isokrates wrote a speech on his behalf entitled *On the team of horses* (Περὶ τοῦ ζεύγους; Isok. 16). Plutarch later refers both to the incident and to the speech (12.3). Perhaps not all readers would notice the allusion; but for those who do, this anecdote, and the language with which it is described, suggest that the characteristics of bravery and ambition, and the popularity which they brought, would later work against him and lead to his downfall.<sup>58</sup>

### Playing the *aulos*

ἐπεὶ δ' εἰς τὸ μανθάνειν ἦκε, τοῖς μὲν ἄλλοις ὑπήκουε διδασκάλοις ἐπιεικῶς, τὸ δ' αὐλεῖν ἔφευγεν ὡς ἀγεννὲς καὶ ἀνελεύθερον· πλήκτρου μὲν γὰρ καὶ λύρας χρήσιν οὐδὲν οὔτε σχήματος οὔτε μορφῆς ἐλευθέρῳ πρεπούσης διαφθείρειν, αὐλοὺς δὲ φυσῶντος ἀνθρώπου στόματι καὶ τοὺς συνήθεις ἂν πάνυ μόλις διαγνῶναι τὸ πρόσωπον. ἔτι δὲ τὴν μὲν λύραν τῷ χρωμένῳ συμφθέγγεσθαι καὶ συνάδειν, τὸν δ' αὐλὸν ἐπιστομίζειν καὶ ἀποφράττειν ἕκαστον, τὴν τε φωνὴν καὶ τὸν λόγον ἀφαιρούμενον. "αὐλείτωσαν οὖν" ἔφη "Θηβαίων παῖδες· διαλέγεσθαι γὰρ οὐκ ἴσασιν· ἡμῖν δὲ τοῖς Ἀθηναίοις, ὡς οἱ πατέρες λέγουσιν, ἀρχηγέτις Ἀθηναῖα καὶ πατρῷος Ἀπόλλων ἐστίν, ὧν ἡ μὲν ἔρριψε τὸν αὐλόν, ὁ δὲ καὶ τὸν αὐλητὴν ἐξέδειρε." τοιαῦτα παίζων ἅμα καὶ σπουδάζων Ὀλκιβιάδης αὐτόν τε τοῦ μαθήματος ἀπέστησε καὶ τοὺς ἄλλους. ταχὺ γὰρ διήλθε λόγος εἰς τοὺς παῖδας, ὡς εὖ ποιῶν Ὀλκιβιάδης βδελύττοιο τὴν αὐλητικὴν καὶ χλευάζοι τοὺς μανθάνοντας. ὅθεν ἐξέπεσε κομιδὴ τῶν ἐλευθερίων διατριβῶν καὶ προεπηλακίσθη παντάπασιν ὁ αὐλός.

When he came to learning, he listened to his other teachers properly, but he avoided playing the pipes, saying it was vulgar and not suitable for a free man. For, he said, the use of the plectrum and the lyre did not damage either the bearing or the appearance which befitted a free man, but when a fellow blows on the pipes with his mouth even his friends would scarcely recognise his face. What is more, he said, the lyre articulates and sings alongside its

<sup>58</sup> Cf. Plutarch's words when he introduces the incident of the stolen chariot, 'a slander or some ill-will which came about in connection with this φιλοτιμία provided much for people to talk about' (12.3). The φιλοτιμία in question is the eagerness of some cities in the Athenian Empire to give Alkibiades gifts (for this meaning of φιλοτιμία, see Whitehead [1983], 60-70; Frazier [1988], 114-116 and 125-126), which allowed Alkibiades to obtain the chariot which belonged to Argos. But the link between Alkibiades' own ambition, the φιλοτιμία of the cities, Alkibiades being talked about, and malice or ill-will towards him is suggestive.

user, whereas the pipe muzzles and blocks up each man, taking away both his voice and his power of speech. 'So let the children of the Thebans play the pipes', he said. 'For they do not know how to converse. But we Athenians, as our fathers tell us, have Athena as foundress and Apollo as ancestral god, and the former threw away the pipe, while the latter also flayed the piper.' In this way, half in jest and half seriously, Alkibiades caused both himself and the others to revolt from the lesson. For the story quickly spread amongst the children that Alkibiades was right to loath playing the pipe and to mock at those who learnt it. As a result the pipe was exiled totally from liberal pursuits and was altogether scorned. (*Alk.* 2.5-7)

This anecdote concerns Alkibiades' rejection of *aulos*-playing, and the consequent reaction against it by other children. As we have noted, the story perhaps had its origins in a passing remark in the Platonic *First Alkibiades*.<sup>59</sup> Alkibiades' refusal to learn the *aulos* would probably not have seemed particularly controversial to an ancient reader. Playing the *aulos*, like playing most other instruments, was not considered a high status occupation, at least from the fourth century onwards.<sup>60</sup> Indeed Alkibiades' explanation that the *aulos* takes away the power of speech and his appeal to the mythological precedent of Athena and Marsyas were common place. Both Plato and Aristotle use the same myth to justify, as Alkibiades' does, the rejection of flute-playing.<sup>61</sup> The myth is not explained; evidently Plutarch expected his readers to know it.

But Alkibiades' explanation of why Athenians should not learn the flute involves an implicit comparison of himself with two deities, Athena and Apollo, 'of whom the former threw away the pipe, while the latter also flayed the piper'. Such self-aggrandisement will be a feature of Plutarch's picture of Alkibiades throughout the *Life*. In the final chapter of the anecdotal section Alkibiades again encourages comparison of himself with deities: he has an image of Eros portrayed on his shield and poses in a picture with the goddess Nemea (16.1, 7); both of these actions, Plutarch tells us, were seen by some as betraying tyrannical aspirations and induced wild enthusiasm in others. But there is an irony too in Alkibiades' choice of this particular myth, concerning as it does a mortal who vied with the gods, and was punished for it. This suggests a hybristic side to Alkibiades' own nature and leads the reader to expect a bad end for Alkibiades too.

<sup>59</sup> Alkibiades' relationship to playing the *aulos* may have been a site of some disagreement. Athenaios (184d) records a statement of Douris of Samos, in a work on Sophokles and Euripides (*FGrH* 76 F 29), that Alkibiades learnt the *aulos* from Pronomos, who, he says, had become very famous. In fact, Pronomos is depicted playing the *aulos*, and named, on the so-called Pronomos vase, which dates from c. 400 BC (Naples 3240). We cannot be certain to what purpose Douris put this detail.

<sup>60</sup> See e.g. Wilson (1999), 74-85. Hence perhaps Athenaios' mild surprise that in former times 'even playing the *aulos* was taken very seriously' (καὶ ἡ αὐλητικὴ περισπούδαστος ἦν). The situation may have been somewhat different in Thebes.

<sup>61</sup> Plato, *Rep.* 399d-e; Aristotle, *Politics* 1341b2-8. On the myth, see McKinnon (1984), 204-213; Mathiesen (1999), 178-181; Wilson (1999), 60-66. On the Plato and Aristotle passages, cf. McKinnon (1984), 204-206 and 210-213; Wilson (1999), 92-94.



The mention of the flute here might possibly also make some readers think of Alkibiades' drunken entrance in the *Symposium* in the company of flute-girls. But his reference to Marsyas would certainly bring to mind another part of the *Symposium*, Alkibiades' extended and eulogistic comparison of Sokrates to Marsyas (215a-216c). Plutarch evidently expected his readers to know this passage, which is alluded to frequently throughout chapters 4-6 of the Life.<sup>62</sup> The allusion looks forward to the power of Sokrates' words over Alkibiades, a power which will in chapter 6 be expressed in language drawn from the same passage in the *Symposium* (6.1).<sup>63</sup>

The extraordinary effect which Alkibiades' rejection of the *aulos* has on the other boys and on public opinion generally prefigures his later popularity and influence, and demonstrates the effectiveness of his speech and his charisma. The explanation which Alkibiades gives centres on the fact that the *aulos* distorts its player's appearance and prevents him from speaking or singing: both of which - beauty and a way with words - are, as we have seen, key elements in the characterisation of Alkibiades. Alkibiades' manipulation of public opinion is also a feature of his later behaviour. The remarkable anecdote of his cutting off his dog's tail (9.1-2) functions to bring this out. Its point is Alkibiades' punchline 'I want the Athenians talk about this so that they don't say anything worse about me' - which suggests both Alkibiades' clever repartee, his self-centredness, and his love of being the centre of public interest. The closing phrase, however, also suggests, as does the passage here, that public opinion will not always be on his side - the Athenians will indeed later have much worse to say about him.

This same combination of extraordinary popularity combined with forebodings of future reversal will be repeated in a later anecdote narrated in chapter 10, which is introduced as Alkibiades' first 'entry on to the stage of public life' (πάροδον εἰς τὸ δημόσιον: 10.1). Here Alkibiades comes forward to make a donation to public funds, and is greeted with shouts of joy.<sup>64</sup> The people are described as 'applauding

<sup>62</sup> For references see Duff (forthcoming, a). Jones (1916), 139-142, and Helmbold and O'Neil (1959), 61 list a few of the allusions to the *Symposium* in Plutarch's work generally (cf. also Duff [1999], 143-144).

<sup>63</sup> E.g. Plut. *Alk.* 6.1: ἀπομένων τῶν λόγων αὐτοῦ καὶ τὴν καρδίαν στρεφόντων καὶ δάκρυα ἐκχεόντων ~ Plato, *Symp.* 215e: ὅταν γὰρ ἀκούω, πολὺ μοι μᾶλλον ἢ τῶν κορυβαντιῶντων ἢ τε καρδία πηδᾷ καὶ δάκρυα ἐκχεῖται ὑπὸ τῶν λόγων τῶν τούτου, ὁρῶ δὲ καὶ ἄλλους παμπόλλους τὰ αὐτὰ πάσχοντας. Plutarch also makes direct reference to the *Symposium* passage in *Prof. in Virt.* 84d, when he uses Alkibiades as an example of one who was properly moved by admiration for a virtuous man, and in *Quomodo adulat.* 69f, where he uses Sokrates' behaviour to Alkibiades as an example of the outspokenness which a friend should sometimes use in order to correct the faults of another.

<sup>64</sup> The incident which is envisaged here is an *epidosis*, an appeal for voluntary contributions to the state, which took place in the Assembly at times of crisis. Theophrastos' Ungenerous Man (ὁ ἀνελεύθερος) keeps silent or leaves the Assembly when such contributions are taking place - the opposite to Alkibiades' behaviour. On *epidosis*, see Pritchett (1974-), ii, 110 n. 286. The version in *Praec. Ger.* 799d, which has the bird escape while Alkibiades' is speaking, seems to envisage a different context. As Russell notes, 'the incident is undatable and sounds as though it may be comic in origin' (1966b, 42-43 = 1995 repr., 200). Proklos, *On Plato's Alkibiades I*, 110, gives a briefer but more fantastical version of the story, as an illustration of Alkibiades' despising of money: Alkibiades

and shouting in pleasure' (κρατοῦντος καὶ βοῶντος ὕφ' ἡδονῆς) which is probably to be thought of as a sexual metaphor: he is a lover of the people, desired by them just as his real lovers desire him, flattering and using them just as his real lovers flatter and use him (4.1; 6.1-5).<sup>65</sup> But just as he will turn the tables on his real lovers (e.g. 4.4-5.5), so the people will turn on him.<sup>66</sup> While this applause is going on Alkibiades lets escape a quail, which, Plutarch innocently records, he 'happened to have in his cloak'. The people once again 'shout' and have great fun hunting for it. 'They say', Plutarch concludes, 'that the man who caught it and gave it back was Antiochos the helmsman, who became as a consequence a great favourite of Alkibiades' (10.1-2). Once again the educated reader will recognise the allusion: Antiochos is the man who will later precipitate Alkibiades' second exile by disobeying orders and attacking Lysander at Notion (35.5-8). Plutarch makes clear in his narrative of the events leading up to the Battle of Notion that the people reacted so badly to news of the defeat at Notion because of Alkibiades' over-popularity, which was such that they were sure that he must have lost on purpose (esp. 35.2-3). The pleasure and applause with which Alkibiades' behaviour in this passage and in the knucklebone passage is greeted will ultimately be his ruin.

Indeed, the *aulos*-story hints at some reasons for his later fall: a 'story spread' (διήλθε λόγος) that Alkibiades did right in being 'disgusted at' (βδελύττοιο) the playing of the pipes and 'mocking' those who learn it. Perhaps his mockery here would bring to mind his alleged later mockery of the Mysteries. At any rate it is this kind of fastidious behaviour which in chapter 16 will lead to the 'disgust' (βδελύττεσθαι) of the notable citizens at him (16.2), who saw in his affectation a tyrant's ambition.<sup>67</sup> In that final chapter of the anecdotal section Plutarch brings out how it is exactly this - public opinion - which will be so destructive for Alkibiades later on. The section closes with the remark of Timon the misanthrope 'You are doing well to grow up, my boy - for you will grow to be a great curse on the lot of them', to which 'some began laughing, others cursed, and others thought deeply about what was said' (16.9). Plutarch concludes, 'So undecided was opinion (ἡ δόξα) about him due to the unevenness of his nature'.<sup>68</sup> The mention of unevenness recalls,

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is a boy and he gives the huge sum of 10 talents (perhaps based ultimately on the figure of 10 talents for the dowry he received upon marrying Hipparete: see 8.3). He does not mention the incident of the quail.

<sup>65</sup> For the use of the metaphor of *eros* to describe relations between a statesman and his city or people, see Ludwig (2002).

<sup>66</sup> On Alkibiades as sharing many characteristics of the people as presented in this Life, see Pelling (1992), 21-24 (= 20002 repr. 125-128). The metaphor probably calls to mind Plato, *Alk.* I 132a, where Sokrates says that he fears that Alkibiades will be corrupted and become a δημεραστής. See Denyer (2001) ad loc., who cites Plato, *Gorg.* 481d-e; Aristoph. *Knights* 710-1408.

<sup>67</sup> The reader may also call to mind Plato's attack on innovations in children's games in the *Laws* (797a-798e), where he suggests a link between such innovation and innovation in moral and constitutional matters. People, Plato's Athenian maintains, fail to see that such innovators 'having become different themselves seek a different life, and having sought this they desire different institutions and laws.'

<sup>68</sup> οὕτως ἀκριτος ἦν ἡ δόξα περὶ αὐτοῦ διὰ τὴν τῆς φύσεως ἀνωμαλίαν.

of course, the explicit statement of Alkibiades' character in 2.1, with which the anecdotal section opens, and provides a neat sense of closure.<sup>69</sup> But the story, and Plutarch's comment, also foreground again the issue of public opinion, both its importance for Alkibiades and its inconsistencies. He courts it, but will fall by it.

The importance and the fickleness of public opinion is a theme which will also recur in the second half of the Life. It is a rumour that Alkibiades profaned the Mysteries which will cause his first exile. Plutarch leaves it unclear whether Alkibiades was really involved or not (20.8) - but some people believed it and that is what counts.<sup>70</sup> He will return after his first exile to scenes of popular joy (32.3-6).<sup>71</sup> But rumours that he desired tyranny persisted. Plutarch states explicitly that it is unclear whether he really intended to make himself tyrant (35.1). But once again the important factor was that public opinion, or some sections of it, believed that he did.<sup>72</sup> Thus when he fails to capture Andros, the people blame him 'through their disbelief that he [really] had been unable to do it' (ἀπιστία τοῦ μὴ δυνηθῆναι). As Plutarch comments 'It seems that more than anyone else Alkibiades was undone by his own reputation' (35.3).<sup>73</sup> So when Antiochos is defeated at Notion, the Athenians turn on him again and exile him. He is assassinated when in exile through beliefs, both hopes and fears, that he may be able to make a come-back (38.1-6). Exile, then, and death, are where this courting of public opinion will ultimately lead him, and it may be that even this is hinted at in the story of Alkibiades' rejection of the *aulos* in the choice of the word ἐξέπεσε in 2.7. The immediate reference is to the flute 'falling out' of use, but the verb is commonly used of going into exile. As in all these anecdotes, forebodings of disaster lurk below the surface.<sup>74</sup>

### Antiphon's abuses

ἐν δὲ ταῖς Ἀντιφῶντος λοιδορίαις γέγραπται, ὅτι παῖς ὢν ἐκ τῆς οἰκίας ἀπέδρα πρὸς Δημοκράτην τινὰ τῶν ἐραστῶν, βουλομένου δ' αὐτὸν ἐπικηρύττειν Ἀρίφρονος, Περικλῆς οὐκ εἶσεν εἰπὼν, εἰ μὲν τέθνηκεν, ἡμέρᾳ μιᾷ διὰ τὸ κήρυγμα φανεῖσθαι πρότερον, εἰ δὲ σῶς ἐστίν, ἄσωστον αὐτῷ τὸν λοιπὸν βίον ἔσεσθαι, καὶ ὅτι τῶν ἀκολούθων τινὰ κτείνειεν ἐν τῇ Σιβυρτίου παλαίστρᾳ ξύλῳ πατάξας. ἀλλὰ τούτοις μὲν οὐκ ἄξιον ἴσως πιστεύειν, ἃ γε λοιδορεῖσθαι τις αὐτῷ δι' ἔχθραν ὁμολογῶν εἶπεν.

<sup>69</sup> See above, p. 00.

<sup>70</sup> As Murray (1990), 155-156, points out, Alkibiades did not 'parody' the mysteries; his crime was to imitate them (cf. Plutarch's ἀπομιμήσεις in *Alk.* 19.1) in the presence of non-initiates and in a private house. The effect was one of sacrilegious mockery.

<sup>71</sup> They run to meet him with a shout: see above, p. 00.

<sup>72</sup> αὐτὸς μὲν οὖν ἐκεῖνος ἦν εἶχε διάνοιαν περὶ τῆς τυραννίδος, ἄδηλόν ἐστιν· οἱ δὲ δυνατώτατοι τῶν πολιτῶν φοβηθέντες ἐσπούδασαν αὐτὸν ἐκπλεῦσαι τὴν ταχίστην, τὰ τ' ἄλλα ψηφισάμενοι καὶ συνάρχοντας οὓς ἐκεῖνος ἠθέλησεν.

<sup>73</sup> εἴκοι δ' εἴ τις ἄλλος ὑπὸ τῆς αὐτοῦ δόξης καταλυθῆναι καὶ Ἀλκιβιάδης.

<sup>74</sup> Compare the anecdote of Themistokles surveying the bodies of the Persians 'cast up' on the shore in *Them.* 18.2 (above, p. 00), where the word ἐκπεσόντας may likewise carry forebodings of Themistokles' own exile.

In the abuses of Antiphon it is recorded that when Alkibiades was a boy he ran away from his house to a certain Demokrates, one of his lovers, and when Aripbron wanted to disown him, Perikles would not let him, saying, 'If he is dead, it will become known just one day earlier by making an announcement; but if he is recovered safely, he will be beyond recovery for the rest of his life.' It is also recorded that that he killed one of his attendants in the wrestling ground of Sibyrtios by hitting him with a club. But perhaps it is not fitting to believe abuse which their author admits he told out of hostility to him. (*Alk.* 3.1-2)

The final two anecdotes of this section are explicitly introduced as being taken from the 'abuses' of Antiphon.<sup>75</sup> Antiphon is cited by Athenaios for an attack on Alkibiades' use of prostitutes in Abydos, which he places shortly after his being released from the tutelage of his guardians.<sup>76</sup> It is noticeable that Plutarch does not use that story as one of Alkibiades' early anecdotes, even though the story was plainly well known.<sup>77</sup> This cannot be from any desire to play down sexual material, for Plutarch does employ it later, where he has Thrasyboulos son of Thrason denounce Alkibiades after the defeat at Notion for dereliction of duty, 'consorting with the whores of Abydos and Ionia' (*Alk.* 36.2). At any rate, the first anecdote here also concerns a sexual accusation, though one of a potentially even more damaging nature: Alkibiades, when a boy, ran away from home to join one of his lovers.<sup>78</sup> It is easy to see how an anecdote such as this might have arisen: sexual morality was always a possible line of attack in order to denigrate one's political opponents. Indeed we know that Alkibiades was also attacked on sexual grounds by the Sokratic writer Antisthenes, who accuses him of having sex with (συνεῖναι) his mother, daughter and sister.<sup>79</sup>

<sup>75</sup> Antiphon of Rhamnous (c. 480-411 BC), perhaps to be identified with Antiphon the Sophist, was a speech-writer and a leader of the coup of 411, a crime for which he was executed after democracy was restored (cf. *Nik.* 6.1). See Gagarin (1997); Dover (1950), 55.

<sup>76</sup> Athen. 525b=fr. 67, Blass-Thalheim. In that fragment, as in Plutarch's citation here, Alkibiades is accused of sexual immorality in his early life, in this case in Abydos, which is then related to his later behaviour: ἐπειδὴ ἐδοκιμάσθη ὑπὸ τῶν ἐπιτρόπων, παραλαβὼν παρ' αὐτῶν τὰ σαυτοῦ χρήματα, ὥχου ἀποπλέων εἰς Ἀβυδον, οὔτε χρέος ἴδιον σαυτοῦ πραξόμενος οὐδὲν οὔτε προξενίας οὐδεμιᾶς ἔνεκα, ἀλλὰ τῇ σαυτοῦ παρανομίᾳ καὶ ἀκολασίᾳ τῆς γνώμης ὁμοίους ἔργων τρόπους μαθησόμενος παρὰ τῶν ἐν Ἀβύδῳ γυναικῶν, ὅπως ἐν τῷ ἐπιλοίπῳ βίῳ σαυτοῦ [del. Wilamowitz] χρῆσθαι αὐτοῖς. Note the phrase ἐν τῷ ἐπιλοίπῳ βίῳ, which is closely paralleled by Plutarch's τὸν λοιπὸν βίον here (3.1): this would suggest that, whether Plutarch knew Antiphon at first hand or not, his account of these two particular anecdotes may preserve some of the Antiphonic flavour.

<sup>77</sup> Lysias mentions it (fr. 30 Gernet-Bizos=Athen. 534f).

<sup>78</sup> Δημοκράτην [UA: Δημοκράτη Y] τινὰ τῶν ἐραστῶν. This is perhaps Demokrates (genitive Δημοκράτους) the father of the Lysis of the deme of Aixone who is the subject of Plato's *Lysis*. See Davies, *APF* 359-360. Plato's description (*Lysis* 204e; 205c), which includes mention of numerous chariot-victories, makes it plain that the family was very rich. Both first declension and third declension forms of Δημοκράτης are attested: e.g. Traill (1996), 211-220, but in the light of this possible identification we should accept the reading of Y Δημοκράτη.

<sup>79</sup> *Kyros or on Kingship*: fr. V A 141 Giannantoni=*FGrH* 1004 F 5a-b.

But one might wonder why Plutarch has included material so plainly drawn, as he himself acknowledges, from a one-sided polemic.<sup>80</sup> Part of the point must be to suggest the competing and contradictory valuations of Alkibiades which will be such a feature of this Life, as it was of the Alkibiades tradition as a whole. For Alkibiades, furthermore, what mattered was as much what people thought of him as what the reality was, a point Plutarch frequently makes (above, p. 00); so the doubt attached to these stories is actually important in itself: public opinion mattered.<sup>81</sup> But as we have already seen (above, p. 00) it is not uncommon for Plutarch to make use of stories or incidents while at the same time expressing doubts about their reliability - and in the process indirectly demonstrating his own historical competence. In the same way, then, these stories are used in order to throw light on Alkibiades' character and prefigure later themes, and for that their reliability is not of paramount importance.

These two stories from chapter 3 contribute to the picture of Alkibiades' character in several ways. First they introduce his troubled relationship with his guardians, which suggests a self-confidence and an unwillingness to respect authority; this theme will recur in 7.3, where the young Alkibiades declares that Perikles would do better to consider how he could avoid being accountable to the people rather than worrying about how to satisfy them. Secondly they introduce the theme of Alkibiades' many lovers and his inability to resist sexual or any other kind of temptation - which began even when he was a child.<sup>82</sup> The theme of Alkibiades' sexuality will be dealt with at greater length in chapters 4-6 where Plutarch explores his relationship with Sokrates and with his 'other lovers'. Alkibiades consistently abandons Sokrates to consort with other lovers who offer him, as Plutarch explains, not just sexual pleasure but flattery; while Sokrates humbles him and shows how lacking he is in virtue, they play on his ambition (6.2-5). Here we see the start of that process. Alkibiades is presented as running away (ἀπέδρα) from Perikles and Ariphron his guardians, just as later he will run away (δραπετεύων) and be hunted by Sokrates (6.1).<sup>83</sup>

Ariphron, Perikles' brother, wants to make a public announcement of Alkibiades' disappearance, but Perikles demurs, claiming that such an announcement would ruin Alkibiades' reputation.<sup>84</sup> Perikles' declaration is memorable: 'If he is

<sup>80</sup> For other examples of Plutarch expressing caution about believing the testimony of a source because of its writer's bias, see Pelling (1990c), 23-24 (= 2002 repr. 145-146); Nikolaidis (1997), 333-334.

<sup>81</sup> Esp. 16.9 (n. 68 above). See in particular Duff (1999), 222-240 and, on the Alkibiades tradition, Gribble (1999).

<sup>82</sup> παῖς ὢν. παῖς implies that Alkibiades has not yet reached puberty, but it is impossible to be more specific than that (Golden 1985; see also Eyben 1996, 80-82). The use of the term παῖς in this context might suggest that Alkibiades was an object of pursuit by lovers as much as it designates his age. On παῖς as used to denote the younger, supposedly passive, partner or object of sexual pursuit rather than as an indicator of strict age: Dover (1978), 85-87 (cf. Meleagros, *AP* 12.25, 'an eighteen year old παῖς').

<sup>83</sup> ἀποδιδράσκω implies running away by stealth. Cf. Andok. 1.125, discussing the daughter of Isomachos who, after failing to commit suicide, ἀποδρᾶσα ἐκ τῆς οἰκίας ὤχετο. The word is often used of run-away slaves (e.g. Plato, *Kriton* 52d).

<sup>84</sup> The MSS are divided between the legal term ἀποκηρύττειν ('renounce as one's child; deny paternity') and ἐπικηρύττειν ('announce' more generally, though also sometimes with the sense of

dead, it will become known just one day earlier by making an announcement; but if he is recovered safely, he will be beyond recovery for the rest of his life (εἰ δὲ σῶς ἐστίν, ἄσωστον αὐτῷ τὸν λοιπὸν βίον ἔσεσθαι).<sup>85</sup> The saying reinforces the sense of Alkibiades' debauched life, which began when he was young. It also introduces the notion that Alkibiades always managed to 'get away with' - to escape the consequences of - his bad behaviour. Many of the anecdotes that follow in the next chapters show him behaving outrageously, but not suffering for it - until later. Indeed Plutarch comments specifically on this fact in the final chapter of the anecdotal section (16.5), where he tells us that the Athenians were always ready to forgive and put up with his sins, calling them pranks (παιδιάς, the etymology is significant) and the products of ambition. Here is an early example of Alkibiades 'getting away with it'.

The second item of abuse taken from Antiphon is worse: that he actually beat an attendant to death at a wrestling ground. The fact that it is a wrestling ground is probably significant as this shows where his bad behaviour can lead: biting an opponent while wrestling might seem like a joke and give rise to a clever saying (2.2-3), but Alkibiades is also capable of clubbing someone to death there too. We have then here a reference back to the first anecdote, and a sense of closure before the section which focuses on Sokrates is introduced. Plutarch goes on to cast doubt on the veracity of this report, which, as we have seen, allows him in effect to 'have his cake and eat it'. It is notable that the verb in this second anecdote taken from Antiphon - unlike the verbs in the first - is in the optative (κτείνειεν), a rather rare form in Plutarch; the use of the optative perhaps has the effect of distancing the narrator from what is reported.<sup>86</sup> But despite his expressions of doubt and despite the distancing device of the optative, this anecdote suggests the violence and dangerousness of Alkibiades, characteristics which lurk below the surface of his charm and flamboyance. This is the man who will later beat a teacher for not having a copy of Homer (7.1), hit his prospective father-in-law for a bet (8.1), prevent his wife by force from suing for a divorce (8.5), punch a rival *choregos* in the theatre (16.5), and carry a motion to execute all Melian men after the surrender of their island (16.6). If the first of the anecdotes with which we dealt in this paper introduced an attractive Alkibiades, the last one reminds us that with him there is a darker, more violent side.

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'renounce, condemn'). Whichever word is accepted, the meaning is clear: Ariphton - according to Antiphon - wanted to publicly humiliate Alkibiades. In Athenian law fathers had the right of ἀποκίρυξις, that is the removal of a son from the family and the denial of the right to use the father's name (in effect a denial of paternity). This would have the serious consequence of preventing a son from inheriting his father's property. There was certainly a tradition that this had happened to Themistokles, though Plutarch himself doubted the story (*Them.* 2.8; see Frost [1980], 69). The attachment of the story to Alkibiades may have been influenced by the tendency to compare him with Themistokles (see Duff, forthcoming, b). But it seems extremely unlikely that a guardian could disinherit a ward, so what must be implied here is some sort of moral, but not legal, renunciation. On ἀποκίρυξις, see Harrison (1968), 75-7; MacDowell (1978), 91.

<sup>85</sup> For this sort of pun, cf. Themistokles' words in *Them.* 29.10, ὦ παῖδες, ἀπολώμεθα ἄν, εἰ μὴ ἀπολώμεθα.

<sup>86</sup> On Plutarch's use of the optative, cf. Hein (1914).

**Plutarch's cinematic technique**

The first of the anecdotes from Antiphon is linked thematically with the next section of the Life (4-7), which deals with his relationship with Sokrates and his other lovers. But the transition from the first to the second anecdote, however, is rather jarring; the link is simply that both are recorded by the same author ('[and it is also written] that . . .'). Much of this paper has been arguing that the *themes* and *images* which run through these anecdotes are closely related to each other and to the rest of the Life. But little else is done to make the anecdotes seem to run on naturally one from the other. In the other cases the transition is managed simply by a vague reference to Alkibiades' age ('when he was still little . . . when he came to learning . . .'). This is not such a surprise: such anecdote clusters in Plutarch often simply pile up stories one after the other in a sort of narrative asyndeton: take the stories, for example, in *Them.* 18, which illustrate Themistokles' eagerness for fame. But here we might see an additional effect of such a staccato structure: the very abruptness is expressive. Alkibiades can be viewed from so many points of view, his behaviour is so unpredictable, that smooth links would not convey the essence of a man who was known for his very unpredictability. This unpredictability and this kind of abrupt transition are features of the rest of the anecdotal section.<sup>87</sup>

Plutarch's initial characterisation of Alkibiades is brief and rather stereotyped (ambition, desire to win at all costs, inconsistency). The first two chapters of childhood anecdotes are introduced explicitly to illustrate this characterisation: it is not uncommon for Plutarch to begin with a fairly crude characterisation, which is then fleshed out as the Life progresses.<sup>88</sup> The childhood anecdotes, then, put flesh on the bones; they provide a picture of the kind of outrageous behaviour that Alkibiades' ambition resulted in. But, as we have seen, they are in fact much richer than the initial characterisation might lead one to expect;<sup>89</sup> they deepen our understanding of Alkibiades' character, introducing notions such as his ambiguous sexuality and his violence. They also prefigure both the later results which his behaviour will have, and the themes and images which will be important in the Life as a whole. While the 'inconsistency' which Plutarch declares showed itself 'later' is not brought out explicitly, we are given a picture of a man willing to do anything for success: his later volte-faces, in both character and allegiance, will seem to sit easily with the characteristics fleshed out here. Thus Alkibiades, for all his inconsistency, remains, in Pelling's terminology, an 'integrated' character - that is, his different traits are seen to lead naturally one from each other.<sup>90</sup>

<sup>87</sup> E.g. esp. 7.1-2, 9.1-2, and all of 16. I argued this further in Duff (1999), 229-240.

<sup>88</sup> Pelling (1988a), 268-71 (= 2002 repr. 293-4), on Lysander; (1988b) 12-13, on Antony; (1990a) 228-30 (= 2002 repr. 310-12), on Alkibiades and Theseus; and esp. (1996), xlv-vi on *Alk.* 2.1. For the related technique, which Pelling labels 'narrative delay', in Thucydides, see idem (1991) 121-2 on Thucydides, citing Connor (1984), 36-48 and 236-42; Pelling (2000), 69, 89-93; Rood (1999), esp. 109-130.

<sup>89</sup> For the greater complexity of Plutarch's moral programme compared with what is implied in the explicit statements, cf. Duff (1999) 52-71.

<sup>90</sup> Pelling (1988a), 262-274 (= 2002 repr., 287-297); (1990a), 235-244 (= 315-321); (1996), xlv-ix (on Alkibiades). Cf. Pelling (1997a) for other such 'consistently inconsistent' figures (citing Rudd 1976, 160-162).

This can be related to wider ancient conceptions of character. Pelling has emphasised that in tragedy, although the character-traits of an Oedipus, an Antigone, or a Medea are in themselves fairly broad-brush and even stereotypical, still the particular combination of traits and above all the particular actions and choices that each makes in reaction to the particular circumstances with which each is faced do serve to give us a sense of something distinctive about each.<sup>91</sup> In the same way the childhood anecdotes serve to individuate Alkibiades: if the opening characterisation gives a rather stereotyped picture, the anecdotes that follow show just how this kind of drive to win at all costs worked itself out in the life of one unique individual.<sup>92</sup> Indeed the abruptness and unpredictability of the links from one story to the next suggest nicely the qualities of unpredictability which will later be so central to Alkibiades' character.

These anecdotes, then, are carefully constructed and play an important role in conditioning the reader as to what to expect of Alkibiades' character, behaviour and fate. They are in no sense whatsoever marginal to the Life as a whole. That is important to stress, because there has been a tendency to regard sections of the Lives which do not give a chronological narrative of political or military events - which are not, in other words, history as the ancients defined it - as somehow of less importance, less worth reading. On the contrary, in these stories we find introduced so many of the themes and images which will be developed later. If in the young Alkibiades we see a miniature version of the adult, so in the stories of the doings of the young Alkibiades we see prefigured the reactions which he will induce and the fate that awaits him.

And it is to a large extent through imagery and metaphor that Alkibiades' character is constructed and conveyed. This is a common ancient technique. Ancient writers often give unity to their texts, or to episodes and to characters within their texts, through recurring imagery, metaphors or language. Tragedies, for example, use imagery to define meaning and character: hunting in Euripides' *Bacchai*, sight and blindness in Sophokles' *Oedipus the King*, sacrifice, hunting, dripping blood, wind, disease and, most spectacularly, the lion-cub which reverts to its savage nature and turns on those who nurtured it - a symbol for the whole bloody sequence of events in the house of Pelops - in Aeschylus' *Oresteia*.<sup>93</sup> Tacitus likewise gives unity to episodes in his narrative through the repetition of a dominant metaphor: food and starvation for the year AD 33, or acting and the stage for the Pisonian conspiracy of AD 65.<sup>94</sup> The imagery of the emperor making war on his own city is used both to

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<sup>91</sup> The whole issue of the extent to which ancient writers, especially Plutarch, present stereotyped or individuated characters is dealt with by Pelling (1988a; 1990a; 1990b) and by Gill (1983; 1986; 1990; 1996). Pelling's response to Gill's 1996 book, as far it touches biography, is especially useful (Pelling 2002b, 321-329). On characterisation and tragedy, see esp. Pelling (1990b) and the other papers in the *Characterization and Individuality* volume.

<sup>92</sup> On Alkibiades as individuated, cf. Pelling (1990a), 228-230 (= 2002 repr., 310-311); Duff (1999), 229-240. On anecdotes as a means of individuating, see Pelling's remarks (1997a), 139-140) on Dio Cassius.

<sup>93</sup> See e.g. Gould (1978). On the *Oresteia*, see B. Knox (1952); Zeitlin (1965); Lebeck (1971), 80-91; Goldhill (1992), 66-73. On the *Oedipus the King*, see Goldhill (1986), 205-221.

<sup>94</sup> Pisonian conspiracy in *Annals* 15, Woodman (1993). The point about the year 33 is made by Woodman in a forthcoming paper.



suggest the violence of imperial rule and implicitly a continuity with the civil wars of the late-Republic.<sup>95</sup>

In a similar way Plutarchan Lives often have dominant metaphors and imagery which may run across one or both Lives of a pair and which convey something of the character of the subject or subjects.<sup>96</sup> Take the imagery of fire in the *Alexander*. An initial characterisation defines the 'mix' of Alexander's body (ἡ τοῦ σώματος κρᾶσις) as 'hot and fiery (πυρώδης)'; this fiery nature explains his peculiar ruddiness and smell (*Alex.* 4.5). Once this association of Alexander and fire is made, then the image is deployed to refine Alexander's character. Recurring fire imagery conveys something of the ambiguity inherent in Alexander's charismatic dynamism: for example, the description of naphtha and the setting alight of a slave boy (35.10-16), followed by the burning of the palace at Persepolis (38.4-6), suggests both Alexander's speed of movement and brilliance and his violence and destructiveness. Finally Alexander dies, literally 'burns up', through fever (πυρέττειν).<sup>97</sup> The metaphor of fire, then, does more than just illustrate Alexander's character: it defines and conveys it; it adds to our understanding of his character in ways not conveyed through narrative or authorial statement, and it provides a unity to the text and a sense of closure. On a smaller scale, the image of ships or bodies being 'cast up' on the shore both conveys something of Themistokles' psychology and marks the trajectory of the Life (*Them.* 2.8; see above pp. 00-00). In a similar way, then, the childhood anecdotes of Alkibiades set out imagery and metaphors which define Alkibiades' character: wrestling, biting, the lion, dice, his mouth, scenes of popular adulation, lovers, violence. As so often in Plutarch, character is created as much through imagery as through authorial statement or through action.<sup>98</sup>

This is more than a literary technique: Plutarch's picture of Alkibiades, carefully constructed through anecdote and image, has much to offer us in any attempt to understand the historical Alkibiades. It is true that on one level Plutarch's *Lives* are not very accurate - if by accuracy we refer to the reliable transmission of certain key facts, such as dates, troop numbers, the complexities of political procedures. Plutarch, as has long been recognised and as he himself admits at the start of the *Alexander - Caesar*, did not always put great priority on such things. Indeed Donald Russell stressed that the few chronological references that Plutarch makes with regard to Alkibiades' childhood are misleading; there is no reason to

<sup>95</sup> Keitel (1984); Woodman (1992), 185-186.

<sup>96</sup> Cf. Larmour (2000), 269 [citing Pelling (1988b), 21-22 (on *Demetr.-Ant.*) and Carney (1960), 24-25] on metaphors as giving unity, and ibid 274, 'Themistocles is, to a significant degree, characterised by metaphors and similes . . .'. Larmour then lists some of the similes applied to Themistokles by other characters within the Life.

<sup>97</sup> See Sansone (1980).

<sup>98</sup> Cf. Hughes (1955) iv, on Aeschylus: "The issues, the themes, the motives that make for conflict, for drama, find their most complete expression not in the characters' declarations of fact but in their statements in symbol, symbol which in syntax, in the circumstances of language, becomes image. Imagery in the Aeschylean plays does not then simply illuminate or even illustrate drama. In its recall of past events, in its anticipation of future events, in its definition - not description - of present conflicts it actually creates drama." (Quoted from Zeitlin [1965] 463 n. 1).

think that Plutarch preserved or wanted to preserve the chronological sequence in which these childhood events took place.<sup>99</sup>

But accuracy or reliability can consist in more than just chronology. Just as a historical novel, a play, or a film may capture and communicate the essence of a period, an event, or a person far more successfully than any number of works of academic history, so in his *Lives* Plutarch is able to communicate the essence of the men, the societies, and the periods about which he writes. To take but one example from Alkibiades' childhood anecdotes, the image of wrestling - Alkibiades cheating, biting and behaving 'like a woman' in order to win, and his later psychological wrestling with Sokrates - conveys something profound and memorable about him. Similar could be said about the anecdote of Alkibiades' throwing himself in the path of the wagon, to be greeted with the cheers of onlookers.

The comparison with film - or with the stage - is particularly apposite here: Plutarch works not by explication or explicit statement, but by presenting us with a series of scenes, where narrative-time slows and the camera focuses, as it were, on a set-piece tableau, striking, colourful, and memorable.<sup>100</sup> The sense that Plutarch in this latter scene gives the audience - or viewer - of Alkibiades' reckless impetuosity, and the wild popular enthusiasm that this produced, together with hints that the people will one day turn against him, be as fickle and inconsistent as he, communicates something very profound about Athenian politics in the highly-charged atmosphere towards the end of the Peloponnesian War. Plutarch does not here make the point about the people's changeability and the dangers of courting popular favour directly; he does that elsewhere (e.g. *Praec. Ger.* 799c-d), though it would be left to modern scholars to analyse this phenomenon in detail.<sup>101</sup> But Plutarch's dramatic picture is both memorable, easy to grasp and, in essence, accurate. As Plutarch himself claimed at the start of the *Alexander*, a selective portrait, which concentrates on 'the signs of the soul', may well capture more of the essence of the man and his times than a more detailed but less imaginative account.<sup>102</sup> Images can convey more than a thousand words.

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<sup>99</sup> Russell (1966b), 42-43 (= 1995 repr., 200).

<sup>100</sup> The classic analysis of Plutarch's technique of articulating his narrative into a number of set-piece scenes ('grandes scènes') is Frazier (1992).

<sup>101</sup> E.g. R. A. Knox (1985); Sinclair (1988), 169-176; Ober (1989).

<sup>102</sup> Pelling (1992), 29 and 31 (= 2002 repr. 132 and 133-134) makes a similar point.

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